

April 11, 2023

Good Afternoon,

I am Stephanie Rosen, the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Montgomery County, M (NAMI MC). NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. A key service of NAMI is to build communities of peers to provide support, education, and advocacy for all affected by mental illness.

I am here today to advocate on behalf of the one in five or 200,000 residents who live in Montgomery County with mental illness.

In terms of the county's budget, I am advocating for two specific requests. Both support the county's vision to be more inclusive and equitable. And supporting families and youth so that they thrive and succeed in their life and ambitions.

The first is for the county to include voices like NAMI MC in your planning process related to behavioral health services. We have a unique lens and in the spirit of being person-centered, those of us who are most impacted and actually use your services should have an upfront decisionmaking voice in these discussions. Further, your data should include feedback from users on your programs and that data should be publicly available to the community.

The second relates to the depth of the behavioral health workforce shortage. This issue cannot be overstated with shortages leading to longer wait-times for services; an overreliance on non-mental health professionals as first responders; and providers opting out of any payor system, accepting cash-only payment for services. It should be noted that none of these byproducts would be acceptable for a physical health need such as for open heart surgery.

Of course, this issue is bigger than Montgomery County, but there is a need for the budget to reflect competitive compensations so that county mental health professionals will remain in the system rather than going into private practice and/or no longer taking insurance payments. Specifically, we know of many staff vacancies including at the crisis center, the mobile crisis units and the Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health Services which serves as the safety net for families with the most need.

*Hope starts here.*



# Montgomery County

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As someone with lived experience, I can personally attest to the value that providing resources and treatment has towards enabling individuals to lead productive successful lives. I have major depressive disorder and owe a large part of my recovery to NAMI MC. NAMI MC provided me with what many mental health care providers could not, I learned that my depression wasn't my fault. I didn't ask for it, and it was okay that I had to leave Medical School. I learned acceptance, hope, and wellness. For many the consequences of mental illness are much graver and I share my story because I ask so many others to.

Let me remind you what is at stake, untreated mental health conditions can lead to caregiver and family stress, homelessness, suicide, and shortened life spans.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to contact NAMI-MC if we can help any of your constituents. We have free programs and a network of volunteers who understand the emotions and have firsthand experience navigating the behavioral health needs in our county. Simply put, we are here to ensure that individuals and families in Montgomery County do not have to walk that difficult journey alone.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie Rosen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Stephanie Rosen  
Executive Director

*Hope starts here.*